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Joffre, "The Man Of The Hour"

*A Brief Biography of the Man Who Saved Civilization by Winning
the Battle of the Marne*

JOSEPH JACQUES JOFFRE, marshal of France, was born sixty-five years ago in the village of Rivesaltes, in the fruit-growing district of southern France, near the Spanish border.

The villagers who point out the cottage in which he was born say that he was a prodigy—that he fought because they wished to drag him away from his study of mathematics.

His father was a cooper and small fruit grower, and there is a sister, Mme. Artus.

The ease with which the boy solved the most intricate problems of mathematics interested the villagers, but they did not see in him a great man—they thought him too slow and methodical to be a notable success in anything. But his habit of system and thoroughness saved France.

The boy was sent to school at Lyons. His father was too poor to pay for the schooling and an uncle provided the funds. The boy's taste for mathematics led to a desire to be an engineer in the army, and when he was 17 years old he was admitted to the Ecole Polytechnique—the only student ever admitted at that early age.

While he was still at the Polytechnique came the Franco-Prussian war and he took part in the defense of Paris. In September, 1872, he was graduated into the engineering corps of the army and went to work on fortifications outside Paris. Later he built fortifications at Tonkin, China. In China the natives called him "The Man With the Eyebrows."

From Tonkin Joffre went with an expedition to Formosa, where he built fortifications under fire from the natives.

Then he was sent to the Island of Madagascar, and there he left a monument—the fortifications and naval base at Diego Suarez, described as wonders of their kind.

Next Joffre went with an expedition to Dahomey as aid to the commander. The commander was killed and Joffre succeeded him. He rallied a retreating force, led it against superior numbers and took the City of Timbuctoo.

After Timbuctoo Joffre remained in France. He was professor at the military school, director of engineers, general of brigade, general of division, commander of an army corps. It was during this time he worked out the strategy that in 1914 won the battle of the Marne.

In July, 1911, the superior war council of France selected Joffre for commander in chief of the army. Immediately upon his appointment as commander in chief he began organizing the staff which three years later assisted him in winning the battle of the Marne. He built the staff for fighting purposes, weeding out all weak elements, and when the crisis

came he had the army's fighting genius where it would do the most good and the men were acquainted with their duties. The mobilization plan which worked so smoothly was his.

His thoroughness was illustrated in the great battle of the Marne. He had the whole action schemed out on August 27, orders written, etc., and spent five days going over it again and again before he gave the word to begin. When the battle got started on September 5 it ran like clockwork. Everything had been provided for.

A French officer described Joffre as a man "who wants what he wants when he wants it and who always knows what he wants and why he wants it."

After the battle of the Marne there were a few who feared the possibility of Joffre's popularity—that he might become "the man on horseback." But Joffre soon eased their minds. He seldom was seen on horseback, is not a parade general, and carefully avoids any dazzling public display of himself.

The revival of the office of Marshal of France and the appointment of Joffre came on last Christmas day, and press and public hailed the news with delight.

In France they call him "Papa" Joffre, and the popular name they have given him indicates how much the soldier love their genial, gentle, modest chief.

"Silent and reserved" is the answer the biographer gets when he asks a French officer to describe Joffre. When Joffre realized he was a world figure he forbade his officers giving any reminiscences or telling any anecdotes of him.

Here is a biographer's summing up of the great soldier's character:

"Free from all vanity, unassuming in his bearing, simple in his tastes, courteous, eager to praise and slow to blame, scrupulously fair and strictly just, eminently sincere and loyal."

Joffre lost his first wife by death a year after marriage, when he was 21 years old. He married again thirteen years ago.

A friend said to Joffre: "General you have won the greatest battle of the ages."

"What I hope I have won," replied Joffre, "is an early rest in my little home in eastern Pyrenees."

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